

# KID DETECTIVES

The Vanished Vienna Vase



ROSS THOMPSON

# Kid Detectives

Kid Detectives, Volume 1

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## THE VANISHED VIENNA VASE

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**A valuable Vienna Vase has gone missing overnight while Julie and her mother slept. At first Jason and Luke don't think they can do much to help. After taking the advice of the detective Charlie Chan, they start to see some clues. Will it be enough to recover the vase? .....Read on.**

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# **PART ONE**



## HOW IT STARTED

Jason Bettelli and Luke Mills didn't think of their first piece of detective work as detective work. Somebody was in need and they wanted to help. The somebody was Jason's little brother Henry. His best friend was missing. His teddy-bear. Everybody felt sorry for Henry, but they were running out of ideas to help him. He was sucking his thumb again full time and all attempts at getting him to stop had failed. Three or four times a day Jason's Mum would feel a small tug on her dress. It was Henry, and he always asked the same thing. "Where's teddy? Each time, Mrs Bettelli had to think of something new to say to comfort him. Henry wasn't getting over the loss of his bear, Jason could see that. He had to find it. It can't have gone poof! and disappeared. It had to be somewhere

Luke and Jason were long time best friends. Having no brothers or sisters made it hard for Luke to understand what all the fuss with Henry was about. 'All over a toy!' he thought. But if finding the bear was important to Jason, Luke would do all he could to help. Besides, how hard could it be to find a lost teddy bear.

"We've looked all over the house and the yard" Jason said when Luke turned up. Most of their spare time was spent at one or the others house. "The best Mum can get out of Henry is that he left it on the back steps. Louise (Jason's older sister) says she saw him with it on the steps the day it disappeared".

"Looks like we'll have to catch a thief, Luke said. Somebody must have seen the bear over the hedge and sneaked in and taken it".

Jason nodded. "Yeah, seems to be the only explanation. In that case we need a lead or a clue. The TV Police detectives always start by looking for leads, and Sherlock Holmes starts by looking for clues. Probably the same thing I think. And they always start by asking questions".

"OK, let's start by talking to Louise again". Luke liked getting into action. He found it hard to spend time thinking about things first. Jason wasn't like that. Rushing off to do something without some thought and planning didn't make sense to him. That difference in their personalities made them a good team. The secret to staying friends was to be patient when the other person did not think like you. It wasn't always easy.

“Sorry guys,” Louise said when they spoke to her in her bedroom, “the only other thing I saw was a dog”.

“A dog!”

“Yes, it was in our yard. I saw it squeezing out through the hole in the hedge the afternoon Henry’s bear went missing. It came back the next day too. I went to chase it out, but it took off when it saw me. I haven’t seen it since”.

“What sort of dog”? asked Jason.

“Doberman... something, is the name. Black and brown, quite big. I can’t remember the rest of the name”.

“The dog might be the thief. It sounds weird but that’s our only clue”, Luke said when they left Louise’s room.

“Yeah”, said Jason. “I’ll look for a picture of a Doberman online”

The full name was Doberman-Pinscher. Information with the picture Jason found said they were good guard dogs, could be ferocious to strangers, and did not make good Police dogs because they were hard to control.

“That should make it easier to find, Luke mused, not many people have them for pets. Some of those factories behind the shops might have guard dogs, we could start there”.



THE NEXT DAY, AFTER school, they walked to the industrial area to look for the canine thief. Success came quickly. A Doberman Pinscher chained up in a scrap metal yard. Sneaking closer to the fence, they spied Henry’s bear with some other toys on the concrete floor near the dog.

“No way am I going near that dog, Luke said. Let’s go and talk to the owner”.

Walking through the main gate, they picked their way down the muddy driveway. The instant the dog saw them it leaped at them snarling and barking. For a moment Luke and Jason thought their last day had come. They breathed again when the dog jerked to a sudden stop upon reaching the end of the chain attached to its collar. The door of a shed at the end of the driveway opened and an elderly man with a shaggy grey beard came out. He had on dirty baggy trousers, muddy boots, an old ski jacket and a black woollen beanie on his head. When he noticed Jason and Luke his face reddened. He waved his arm, and shouted, “Hey you kids, hop it. No kids allowed in here!! Get going or I’ll set the dog on you”!!

Making an effort to keep his voice strong, Jason said, “We want to ask you something”.



The man turned and shouted at the dog, "Quiet Jack! - Ask me what"?

"The toy bear near the dog belongs to us. Could you get it for us"?

The old man was close now, fixing them with a resentful stare. "I can't help you there, he said, Jack, that's the dog, is half wild, he won't let anybody get near his things, not even me".

"He took it from our back yard, Luke said, it belongs to us."

"The man laughed. "You're welcome to try and get it from him. Jack broke his chain a few days ago and was gone for three days. He kept bringing things here and leaving them when I was not around. He came back because he was hungry, and I got him chained again. No, tell your parents they'll have to buy another bear".

There was nothing else to do but turn and walk out, and home. The family had talked to Henry about a new teddy bear, but he kept shaking his head. 'Maybe he'll get used to the idea', Jason thought. Luke was thinking, he hadn't given up on getting the bear. Half way home he turned to Jason, "I know how we can do it. We'll need to come back tomorrow when the Yard is closed. Jack will be off the chain then. We won't be doing anything wrong. The old man said we are welcome to try and get the bear back".



THEY WERE AT THE SCRAP metal yard at 5.30 pm the next day. They had a small pack of dog biscuits, and Jason's fishing rod. The gates were locked. They could see Jack moving about. The plan was for Luke to go to the far side fence and call the dog, when it came he would start dropping biscuits through the fence to keep Jack occupied. The teddy bear was close to the fence on the other side, in the dog's shelter. Jason's part was to poke his fishing rod through the wire mesh fence, hook the bear, then squeeze it back through the fence by hand. The boys could not see each other because of the piles of scrap metal and wrecked cars stacked high in the yard. Jason was to start his fishing when he heard Luke call Jack. The slowest part for Jason would be getting the bear through the wire mesh of the fence. He stood well back where the dog could not see him until he heard Luke calling, "Come on Jack, come on Jack, come and get a biscuit". Jason poked the rod, with a short length of line having the sinker and hook, through the fence. After a few tries the hook caught in the fur of the bear, and he carefully pulled it too the fence.

He had started squeezing the bear through, when a panicked yell came from Luke. "Jason! Jack has heard you. He's coming over".

Getting the bear through the wire was not something you could do fast. Feeling his heart beating faster, Jason kept tugging at it as hard as he could. He happened to look up and saw Jack come racing around a stack of old cars barking loudly. The dog was running at full speed. The bear was half way through when Jack, his teeth bared, lips curled, snarling - launched himself into the air and slammed into the fence. Jason bounced away and fell over backwards.

Raising himself to a sitting position, Jason saw the dog had knocked the breath out of itself. 'Bruised himself too,' thought Jason. It was standing in silence looking at him through the wire. He looked around for the bear. Then he laughed out loud. There it was lying on the ground on Jason's side of the fence. Jack's collision with the fence had pushed it all the way through. He pumped his fist in the air. Yes! They'd done it.

Luke ran up, puffing. He saw the bear and began dancing about yelling, "Yes! we did it, we did it." They poured the rest of the dog biscuits through the fence for Jack, too show there were no hard feelings, "Yuk, there's dirt and dog drool on this", Luke said in disgust, holding the bear up with his thumb and one finger.

Jason shook his head, "Won't be a problem, Mum has washed and disinfected it a few times before. It'll come out alright". He grabbed his fishing rod, they gave each other a high five, and walked home.

Henry was delighted at the return of his best friend. He jumped up and down, clapping his hands. "Teddy, teddy". The boys were heroes. And that was the end of it. Or so they thought. It would not be long before they found themselves embroiled in a much more challenging adventure.



## **PART TWO**



## THE VANISHED VIENNA VASE

“I wanted to ask you both if you would help us find it”? The girl had walked up to Jason and Luke during the lunch break. The word was around they were good at finding things, and she and her mother had lost something valuable.

“We don’t really have any experience”, Jason said. “It sounds as if what you heard was exaggerated”.

She looked glum. An awkward silence followed. Finally, Luke said, “Tell you what, we’ll meet you at the gate after school and you can tell us about it”. The look on Jason’s face said he didn’t think that was a great idea, but he didn’t say anything.

The girls face brightened, and she smiled. “Ok, I’ll see you then” “Oh, and my name is Julie”.

“Luke,” said Luke.

“Jason,” said Jason.

Later the boys walked with Julie on her usual route home for as long as it took her to give them the details.

“What’s missing is a Vienna Vase worth \$7000. It belonged to my Grandpa and Grandma. They gave it to Mum and me a year ago. It was in a room in our house that was once a private library. We call it the reading room. We’ve only been in the house two months. It’s old, but very nice inside with polished wood panels and lead light windows. We reported the vase missing to the Police. They came and did a thorough investigation.”

“So, it was stolen”? Luke said.

“Yes”, said Julie. “The Police told us whoever took the vase had been clever. They left no finger prints or clues. The vase was on the table in the reading room when we went to bed that night. It was gone when we woke the next morning. It had disappeared. We’ve been careful with security because the people who rented the house before us said they had things stolen that were never found. We are careful to lock windows and doors at night, and when we are away from home. Yet it still happened to us.”

“The Police say they will keep watch for a person trying to sell the vase and catch them that way. They have alerted all the antique shops and sent a

description of the vase, asking them to report it if they see it. We are worried the crooks will try to sell it overseas. Also, the Police told Mum that sometimes crooks wait up to a year before they try to sell something stolen. They hope everyone has given up trying to find it by then. They might never be caught, and we will never see the vase again”.

“If the Police haven’t found anything, Jason said, on their walk home, what hope have we got of finding it”?

“It would be cool to have a look at the scene of the crime, replied Luke. You never know we might discover something. The holidays start on Monday. We could go to Julies on Saturday and have a look around. If we make any discoveries, we’ll have all of next week for the three of us to do something about it”.

“The three of us”! exclaimed Jason.

“Yeah, it would only be fair to let Julie join in with us if we find something. And she knows the house and grounds better than anybody.”

Jason nodded. He was sure it would be a waste of time, but he could see Luke was interested and they were best friends.

At school the next day they copied down Julies address and said they would be at her house at 11am on Saturday morning. Jason and Luke didn’t always have lunch together at school. On Friday it had just worked out that way. Once they were eating, Jason plucked a computer print-out from his pocket and handed it to Luke. “I thought if we are going to do some detective work we should know something about it. I did a Google search and found this”. At the top of the paper it said: **Basics of Detective Work**

A list followed;

**Careful observation.** Learn to see the things others don’t notice. “The world is full of obvious things which nobody observes”. “The detective’s business is to know what other people don’t know”. Sherlock Holmes

“Good detective always look for something unusual” Charlie Chan

**Be patient.** “What detective needs is great patience. Anxious man hurries to fast and stubs big toe”. Charlie Chan

“Make haste only when withdrawing hand from tiger’s mouth”. Charlie Chan

“Must turn up many stones to find hiding place of snake”. Charlie Chan

“Hasty conclusion easy to make like hole in water”. Charlie Chan

**Have a positive attitude and be hopeful.** “Hope is sunshine which illuminate darkest path”. Charlie Chan

“Optimist always see donut. Pessimist only see hole”. Charlie Chan

**Be wise.** “Wise man know way out, before going in”. Charlie Chan

**Be curious.** “Detective without curiosity is like glass eye at keyhole, no use”. Charlie Chan

**Do a lot of thinking.** “Mind like parachute, only function when open”. Charlie Chan

“That head of yours should be for use, as well as ornament”. Sherlock Holmes

**Notice the detail.** “Little things tell big story”. Charlie Chan

**Expect to have some luck in your investigations.** “One grain of luck sometimes worth more than whole rice field of wisdom”. Charlie Chan

**Expect to find clues.** “Clue like oil in water. Will in time rise to surface.” Charlie Chan. “Clue like treasure hidden in snow, later or sooner it will be seen.” Charlie Chan

**Try not to look like a detective.** Don’t wave stick while trying to catch dog.” Charlie Chan

**Understand that Criminals always make mistakes.** “Slippery man sometimes slips in own oil”. Charlie Chan. Man who fights law always loses; same as grasshopper is always wrong in argument with chicken.” Charlie Chan

**Discuss the case with your fellow detectives.** “Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person”. Sherlock Holmes

**Protect surfaces where there might be fingerprints** “Fingerprints very valuable if detective can catch owner of fingers”. Charlie Chan

“Who’s Charlie Chan”? asked Luke.

“I don’t know, but he must be a detective”.

At the bottom of the paper was a **Warning**. If your investigations lead you into danger withdraw as soon as possible and go to the Police. (“Man who flirt with dynamite sometime fly with angels” Charlie Chan.) If you uncover breaking of the law, go to the Police with your evidence.

Jason reached over and tapped the back of the paper. “There’s a list of equipment for detective work on the back”. **Items on the list;** large flashlight, small penlight, cell phone with camera (and GPS if possible) binoculars, magnifying glass, rubber gloves, tweezers, scissors, small and large plastic bags, chalk, notebook and pens, matches, pocket knife (Swiss Army if possible) compass, duct tape, spare batteries, Insect repellent, survival guide book.

After school they managed to get most of the items on the equipment list. Luke brought his families spare cell-phone with camera and GPS. Jason borrowed his Dad’s old army binoculars that were in a box in the garage. It was all in Luke’s backpack when they arrived on Saturday.



JULIE INTRODUCED THEM to Mrs Kostas (Julies other name) as friends from school who wanted to see the room the Vienna vase went missing from. The vase had been on a wide polished walnut rectangular table in the centre of the reading room. It felt a little creepy to stand in the place the vase had done its disappearing act. The windows, always locked at night, had no signs of break in, and without another clue of any kind it was a bizarre mystery. Especially since the vase had gone missing over night while Julie and her Mum were sleeping in the house.

“You should call this the Polar room, Jason said rubbing his hands together and shivering. “It’s so cold in here”.

“Yes, this room is always cold”. “Whenever we come in here to read or to spend time here, we always bring a heater”.

The other rooms aren’t as cold as this”?

“No, only this room”. “It’s strange”.

It would have been a waste of time to search inside the house. Julie and her Mum and the Police, had done a good job of that. The boys searched around the grounds for an hour but found nothing. About then Mrs Kostas called out – would they like a glass of Coca-Cola. On the way in Jason happened to glance up, and noticed a symbol carved on the wooden beam over the front door. A bird cage with its door open and a bird flying free.

“Do you know what that symbol over the door means Julie?” he asked later between slurps.

“No.” “A smaller one exactly like it, is on the door frame of the reading room”. After inspecting this second symbol, the boys decided to look around outside the wall of the property, before going home. A stone wall one and a half metres in height ringed the property. Leafy vines reaching to the ground on both sides covered it in many places. After tromping about for another hour, they understood the truth of Charlie Chans advice. “Detective needs much patience.” It was time to go. Luke gave a heavy sigh, he was disappointed. All that time and no discoveries. He wondered why Jason didn’t seem to be disappointed. In fact, he had the same look on his face that would have been there if they had found a big clue.

The three of them were standing at the front gate and the boys were about to say goodbye to Julie. Something caught Jason’s eye. He walked over to the left gate post and pointed. Luke and Julie came over and saw a very small symbol near the top of the post. A birdcage with its door open, and a bird flying free.

Julie peered at it, “I wonder what they mean? “I’ve never noticed that one,”

Then Jason baffled Luke and Julie by saying, “We’ll be back on Monday at the same time Julie, if that’s OK?”



She nodded “Yes, sure, it’s the holidays so that will be good.”

“If you like, you could do something before Monday, that might help find the vase,” he said.

“Sure, what is it?”

“Search the internet for the history of this house. Anything you can find. Such as who the first owners were, if they were in business, or what their trades were and who they worked for. Anything you can find about the history of the house.”

Julie beamed. Just the sort of thing she liked to do. You might even say it was her specialty. She couldn’t wait to get started. The boys said goodbye and walked home.

“That Charlie Chan guy knows what he is talking about” Jason said on the way.

Why’s that?” said Luke.

“I decided to try and put into practise what was on that detective list and it worked. I looked out for small details and unusual stuff, I tried to be curious, and thought about everything.

“Guess I forgot about it, Luke said. “What did you get?”

“First, the reading room is cold all the time and it’s the only room in the house like that. That’s unusual. “The symbol must mean something because it’s in a lot of places.” “I thought about it and realised it’s only on doors and the gate – entrance ways.” “Must be a reason for that.” “Only those two things, but I’m hoping the history of the house might help explain them.”

Luke’s face lit up, “hey, I know what I can do, I’ll Google search that symbol, and see what I can find.”



LUKE DID HIS BEST, but after one and a half hours of searching he had to accept there was nothing on the internet about the birdcage symbol. The boys were putting all their hope in Julie’s internet search when they arrived on Monday morning.

They were happy to hear her say, “I found a lot. The family that first owned the house was named Clegg. The father was a carpenter and his two sons were apprentices with him. They built the house themselves. It was never proved, but many rumours were around about the family being involved big time, in smuggling. The rumours started because the family always had more money than a carpenter could earn. Also, many men known to be involved in smuggling were visitors to the house. It was also rumoured the house was a safe house for

smugglers Government agents were after. Neighbours said occasionally people entered the house and never came out. Of course, that got everybody talking.”

Jason’s eyes twinkled. “I was hoping you would find something like that.” “I think the birdcage symbol was a secret sign for smugglers”. “Do you guys want to try an idea I have about the symbol?”

Luke and Julie nodded.

“Okay. The first is at the front gate, then the front door, and last the reading room. I think we should look for another symbol in the reading room”. When they walked in Jason waved his hand, “it could be anywhere, and it might be small.” It was small, very small. Julie found it. Julie and her Mum did not own many books and empty bookcases lined most of the walls of the room. The symbol was on the front of the third shelf down of a one metre wide bookcase.

Jason put his hands on the shelf. “Now let’s see if I’m right”. He pressed down on the shelf and nothing happened. He pulled the shelf, and nothing happened. He pushed up on the shelf and it tipped up. The wall between the bookshelf and the next one began to slide silently sideways and a rush of cold air blew into the room. Julie put her hand over her mouth and her eyes popped wide. “Oh my.” When the sliding panel stopped it revealed an opening they could walk through. Five wooden steps were visible with wood panel walls and ceiling. It was too dark to see any more.

Luke turned to hurry out, “I’ll get that big flashlight out of my backpack.”

“Bring the backpack too,” Jason called.



JASON TESTED THE SHELF while they waited. When he pulled the shelf back down the wall slid back and closed. He pushed up again and it slid open. When Luke came back wearing his backpack and holding the flashlight they started down the stairs with Luke leading. After the five wooden stairs, the steps were cut out of the ground, with a flat stone on every step. Jason’s voice echoed in the darkness “The wooden stairs finish at ground level, these stone steps are taking us underground”. He counted twenty steps, then they were standing on flat ground. Luke moved the flashlight slowly around and caught sight of an object close to them. An old black iron candelabra (candle holder) with three candles. It was bolted to one of the wooden support beams.

“Hold still while I get the matches out of your backpack Luke”, Jason said. The lighted candles revealed they were in an area the size of a small room. It was the beginning of a tunnel. Old bottles of all shapes and sizes lay scattered

around the room, and what looked like the remains of old wooden crates. It smelled musty and the air was cold and damp.

Julie picked up two of the bottles. "I'd say they used this as a storage room as well as an escape route for smugglers. Fridges had not been invented in those days. The coolness underground probably helped to preserve some of the goods they were smuggling. That's why the reading room is cold. The cold air down here is seeping in."

"Aha," Luke said, "My turn to notice the unusual." "Look at this". He was pointing to two empty Coca Cola bottles on the ground and an empty donut box. "Signs of the vase thieves." "They had these while they were waiting, before sneaking in to take the vase". "Something else too - that candelabra is old, but those candles are new. They used them to save their flashlight batteries while they waited."

Julie shivered, "That's creepy, they were down here waiting, and Mum and I had no idea."

"Don't touch any of that stuff, Jason said, the Police might get fingerprints from them". "Let's have a look at the tunnel".

Julie walked over to the candelabra. "I'll put these candles out. We don't want to make it obvious we have found the tunnel."



LUKE LEADING AGAIN with the flashlight, they walked into the tunnel. The flashlight gave better light in the narrower space, providing a good view of what was around them. The tunnel measured two meters wide and about two and a half meters to the ceiling. Every four or five meters wooden beams supported the walls and ceiling, much like the old coal mines. Flat stones laid into the ground made a pathway along the centre of the floor. More candelabras without candles appeared along the route. Large rocks protruded from the walls on both sides.

"Must have taken a lot of work to dig this out of the rock," Jason said. "They didn't have any of today's tools and machines".

Ten minutes walk with no end to the tunnel in sight, How long was this tunnel? Should they keep going? "What say we walk for another five minutes then turn back if we don't see the end." Luke suggested. Everybody agreed. It wasn't the end, but inside five minutes an obstacle barred their way. The flashlight revealed a grid of horizontal and vertical black iron bars right across the tunnel from floor to ceiling. It looked old. A door at the centre of the grid had a large padlock on it. Luke shone the flashlight on the padlock. "More

evidence of the crooks. This is a modern padlock.” “I guess we to turn back now.”

Jason didn’t agree. “What we could do is dig a hole to wriggle through under the bottom bar. The ground is soft on both sides of this path. We passed some old wooden crates a few minutes ago. We could use wood from them to scrape out a hole. What do you think Julie?”

Julie was silent for a moment. “Ok, let’s do it, but let’s dig the hole deep enough to allow us to wriggle through fast on the way back if something happens.”

The ground was soft, and it didn’t take them long to dig a hole on the left side of the central path. By lying on their backs, it was easy to wriggle their way under the bottom bar and through to the other side. Each of them was in the process of brushing the dirt off their clothes when Jason suddenly grabbed Luke’s arm. He whispered in a hoarse voice, “Switch the flashlight off Luke.” “Quiet! Listen! “Someone is coming!” Now all three of them could see the light of a flashlight in the distance, coming towards them.

“This is bad,” muttered Julie. “What are we going to do?”. “We don’t have time to get back through the hole.”

“I noticed a big rock in the wall on the other side,” Jason whispered. “If we squeeze up against the wall beside that rock they might not see us in the dark. Don’t make a sound.” Luke and Julie held on to Jason’s Parka and he guided them to the wall.

Hardly daring to breath, the three of them pressed themselves against the wall. The rock protruded out about half a meter and they squeezed themselves into its shadow. The man, they could see his trousers below the knee and his boots by the torch light, walked up to the iron grid and shone his flashlight on the padlock. He rattled it to make sure it was secure. A circle of light from his flashlight surrounded him on the ground. Jason held his breath. He could feel his heart beating double time as he watched the circle of light move close to their hole. ‘If he sees our hole we’re in trouble.’ At the last moment the light moved away as the man turned slightly. Now the light was almost on their sneakers. They dared not move. They could do nothing. Their feet were hard up against the wall. The man would soon see their sneakers. Jason thought hard for a good story to tell when they were discovered. They were in luck. Just as the light reached their sneakers the man lifted the flashlight and shone it down the length of the tunnel. He spent some time moving the light carefully about for a close look at all parts of the tunnel. After a few moments he turned and walked back up the tunnel.

All three of them had been holding their breath. Now they allowed themselves to breathe, quietly. They did not move for five minutes in case the man heard something or decided to come back. Hoping it was safe then, they came away from the hiding place, but didn't switch the flashlight on. Luke let himself breathe deeply. "Wow, that was a close call. Let's get out of here." "You saved us by putting those candles out Julie. They are a long way back, but he would still have seen some light and known something was up." He and Julie made for the hole.

Jason wasn't moving. "Wait, I was thinking it might help the Police if we could tell them how long the tunnel is and what's at the end of it"

"You're joking, right," Luke whispered. It was too dark for Jason to see Luke, but he could imagine the look on his face.

"No, I'm not joking." "That guy is not going to stay in the tunnel. He came down to check everything out. He will leave by the steps or whatever is at the other end. If we go carefully, keeping the flashlight pointed at the ground, we will probably get to the end safely".

"I don't like 'probably.'" Luke whispered.

Jason went on, "I was thinking Julie could wriggle back through the hole and wait on the other side. If we strike any trouble we can yell out to her and she can run back and get her Mum to call the Police. We can only give you the penlight Julie, it'll be enough for you to see where you are going."

None of them moved and no one spoke for a long time. Then Julie said, "It's OK with me".

"It's not really OK with me, Luke whispered, but let's do it".



JULIE PLANNED WHILE they were away to scrape more dirt out of the hole to make it deeper for an emergency exit. Jason and Luke moved off along the tunnel. "If someone does come," Jason whispered as they walked, "we'll see their flashlight and have time to run back and get through the hole."

"I hope you're right," Luke whispered.

It was ten more minutes of walking before they saw up ahead, faint light coming through the ceiling. Coming closer they found it was the end of the tunnel. An old black iron ladder reached from floor to ceiling. It was attached at the top to a framework around a trapdoor. A small amount of light was getting through the edges of the trapdoor. Luke stared in disbelief when Jason, without a word, quietly climbed the ladder and pushed the trapdoor. It would not open. It was either locked or something heavy had been moved over it.

When his insides stopped quivering, Luke whispered, “ We’ll need to find the end of the tunnel above ground. Can you get the cell phone from my back pack”? Luke opened the GPS App on the phone and following the instructions on the screen he marked their location and saved it. “When we’re outside it will lead us to the location directly above us.”

“Good thinking, Jason said. Now we do need to get out of here.”



JULIE LET OUT A HUGE breath. The boys had made it back without trouble. After wriggling back through, they filled the hole in, doing their best to make it look untouched. Walking back, they got to the room at the bottom of the stairs and still feeling nervous, had a small fright when the light from a flashlight signified someone coming down the stairs. It was Mrs Kostas. She had come into the reading room and seeing the opening had decided to investigate. Seeing the three of them she laughed and waved a hand, “So, this is how they stole the vase, the Police will want to hear about this” Julie stayed with her Mum while she rang the Police. Jason and Luke went off to find the above ground location of the end of the tunnel, using the phones GPS.

Remembering Charlie Chans advice to be wise, Luke added the number of the cell phone Julie shared with her mother to the contacts list on his phone. After the tunnel, the boys found themselves noticing the clear sky and the scents of flowers, trees and grass in the air. It was a simple process to request the GPS to lead them to the location Luke had saved. The length of the tunnel was nearly a kilometre but above ground the boys had to walk two kilometres following the GPS directions.

They turned the final corner into Trent St. The GPS had marked number 21 as the above ground end of the tunnel. They halted, and Jason took the binoculars from the backpack. Using them he could see It was a second-hand dealer’s shop, ‘The Trading Post’, with storage rooms at the rear. Nobody seemed to be around even though the shop was open.

“How about we go around the back and have a look through the windows,” Jason suggested. Luke agreed. They crossed the street and walked down the alley at the side of the shop. At the windows they could see inside by standing on their tip toes. What they did not see was the security camera high up on the wall under the roof overhang. All sorts of items were inside, including wooden crates of various sizes.

Luke peered in. “One of those crates will be over the trap door for sure”. “I’ll bet the vase is in there somewhere”. At that moment a heavy hand came down

on each of their shoulders.

“What are you kids doing snooping around here?” The hard voice belonged to a man dressed in jeans and a windbreaker. His grip on their shoulders made both boys grimace.

Attempting to look calm, Jason replied, “We were just having a look to see what’s inside”.

The man snatched the phone from Luke’s hand. The GPS was still on the screen. “You found us using the GPS eh?”

“We’ve just been practising using the GPS,” Luke said. (you can bend the truth when you are dealing with crooks)

The man pushed them roughly, sending them stumbling towards a door. “Inside,” he said. Once inside he called out, “Harry, I caught a couple of kids snooping around at the back. Their phone shows they used GPS to find us.”

Another man wearing a crumpled suit without a tie, and a stained yellow shirt, came into the room.

“I caught them on camera,” the first man said.

Harry glared at Jason and Luke, eyes narrowed. “Put them in the spare room with the dog while we think about this.”

With his hands still on their shoulders, the man guided them to a small room that was empty except for three chairs. “Stay here”. He went out but came back a moment later with a big dog. He nodded at the dog, “Prince here is a trained guard dog.” “He won’t bother you if you stay quiet and still.” “He won’t like it if you move around or make any noise.” He put Luke’s phone into the backpack, dropped it in a corner behind the dog, and turned and left. Jason and Luke heard him lock the door.



AFTER A WHILE JASON decided the only way to find out if the dog did not like whispering was to try it. Turning to Luke he whispered, “We’ve got to get that phone and message Julie.” The dog didn’t move.

“Yeah, but how?” Luke responded.

“I’ll see if he was bluffing us,” Jason whispered. He stood up. Immediately the dog rose to its feet with a deep growl, its eyes fixed on Jason. With a feeling like ice in the pit of his stomach, Jason sat down quickly.

“No bluff,” Luke said.

There wasn’t much to do after that. They whispered to each other when they thought of something to talk about. Of course, they had a lot to think about. What would the men decide to do with them? Did they suspect the boys knew



about the tunnel? Would they think the Police might now know about the tunnel? All questions they had no answer for.

After one hour the door was unlocked and the first man came in with a dog bowl full of cooked meat. He placed it before the dog, said nothing and walked out, locking the door again. The smell of the meat made their stomachs rumble. It was a long time since they had eaten.

Luke leaned over and whispered, "This might be our chance." "You're closest to the backpack." "You might get the phone while the dog is eating".

With most animal's meal time takes first place, everything else is second until they have finished eating. All the dog's attention was on the food. There wouldn't be another chance. The third chair in the room was close to the backpack. Jason thought if he could get to that chair and sit on it, he would have a good chance of getting the phone and sending a message. He stood slowly. His chair creaked loudly. The dog looked up, then quickly put its head down and continued eating. Jason took a step, then another and another. Eating seemed to be the dog's only interest for the moment. He reached the third chair and sat on it. He waited a few minutes for the dog to get used to his new position. Then he slowly reached down and put his hand into the unzipped backpack, found the phone and pulled it out. He waited again for a few minutes. Then slowly and with as little movement as possible, he found Julie's number and sent a message. 'Prisoners at 21 Trent St J/L.'.

Jason leaned over and slowly put the phone back. With the same slow-motion he managed to get back to his seat. They did not want the men suspecting they had sent a message. Now all they could do was wait. After you have been sitting in a bare room with nothing to do for a long time, you start having thoughts. What if Julie didn't notice the message. What if Julie thought it was a joke. Maybe her Mum went shopping with the phone in her handbag. It was best to put a stop to that sort of thinking. All they could do was try to be patient and hope for the best.



AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE a very long time too Jason and Luke, a riotous commotion started out in the shop. People were shouting, things were being knocked over, they could hear running feet. Somebody knocked on their door. "This is the Police." "Jason, Luke, are you in there?"

The boys would have loved to call out, "Yes we are". Because of the dog they had to keep quiet. In a few minutes the door was unlocked, and a Policeman pushed the man in the Windbreaker and jeans into the room. "Call the dog off,"



he ordered. At the command, “Stay Prince,” the dog stood and ambled out of the room. Luke flashed a big grin at Jason. They stood and high fived each other.

Luke was right. The vase was in the storage rooms with other stolen goods. Within a few days it was back in its place on the table at the centre of the reading room. Back in the smuggling days the trapdoor opened into the basement of an Inn. Escaping smugglers would leave the tunnel and mix with the Inns customers before riding off on a horse, or in a coach. The trapdoor remained hidden after the Inn was demolished. The future of the tunnel is uncertain. The Police and the Council want it filled in, but a local Historical Society is campaigning for its preservation as an important piece of local history.

The two crooks found the trapdoor when they leased the shop and did some renovations. They confessed, after they discovered the tunnel lead to Julies house, they found a small lever at the top of the stairs that opened the wall. Whenever new people moved in the robbers entered at night and stole anything they could find of value. Fortunately for Julie and her Mum, the crooks knew the Vienna vase was valuable and did not bother looking for other items to steal. Finger prints on the Coca-Cola bottles lying in the tunnel gave the Police a strong case against the two men.

The officer in charge of the case, Inspector James, congratulated Julie, Jason and Luke on their discovery of the tunnel.

THE END